

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

May 18, 2013

Committee gives do-pass vote to proposed residency requirement (Editorial, Pine Bluff Commercial)

Thumb Up

The advice not to watch sausage being made was apropos for Thursday afternoon's meeting of the Pine Bluff City Council's Administration Committee.

On the table was a proposed ordinance from Ward 4 Alderman Steven Mays. If passed, the ordinance would require department heads to live within 12 miles of the city with one important caveat — current department heads would be grandfathered in. That particular wrinkle, one would presume, would allow the great schism of 2013 over Jeff Hubanks, interim police chief, to be finally and forever healed.

This has been a bone of contention since snowflakes were flying at the first of the year, and for the record, the yard has been mowed three times now and probably could have used a fourth or fifth in there as we napped.

The meeting, however, sounded, from reading Friday's story in The Commercial, like it might have resembled a game of Whac-A-Mole, with this and that alderman first arguing and then standing in defiance to leave the meeting — and then sitting down again. These are the folks you pay to be the most responsible adults in the room, by the way, but banging their heads for their comportment or lack thereof is like wailing away at large fish in a small barrel, as in there's hardly any sport in it, so we'll hold that thought for now.

Mayor Debe Hollingsworth — working within the framework given her, that being to name and un-name, as it were, fire and police chiefs — selected Hubanks as interim chief, but he lives in a neighboring county and that was enough to fuel the fires of dissension.

But it wasn't quite that easy to dismiss Hollingsworth's selection. Even when the prosecuting attorney was dragged into the fray, he declined to pursue charges against the mayor, saying the laws conflicted, and, maybe more importantly, they had been ignored (by many on this same City Council) in the past.

If your handbook at work says everyone has to arrive at work at 8, but management has allowed employees to show up as late as 8:30, guess what? You can't up and fire someone for coming in at 8:15. That's because your practice prevails over your printed policy.

And the attorney with the municipal league said as much, which was that the council needs to remove the conflicting laws and replace them with something clear and concise.

The council has dutifully digested all that professional advice and gone on about its business, which is to throw spitballs at one another. But even at that, even with the stand ups and sit downs and raised voices and accusations, the Mays proposal went forward.

So, dare we say it, that at the meeting on Monday night, the council will have enough votes to pass this measure and move on to some other relatively minor piece of legislation over which it can wrangle and harangue for months at a time? Well, we'll take the victories where we find them, and if that happens, we say yay, pass the sausage.

Where would we be without them?

Thumb Up

We can't say enough nice things about Volunteers in Public Schools. They are such a fixture and have been for years, and they provide so much help that the Pine Bluff School District would have a hard time operating without them. We wondered just how long they have been around, and the answer is that they celebrated their 40th anniversary on Thursday. Unbelievable!

At the celebration, the top-five volunteers were honored for donating a combined — not to mention, amazing — 5,000 hours to local schools this year. Those five are: First Place: Charlie Cannon; Second Place: Curtis Savage; Third Place: Shirley Jacob; Fourth Place: Eugene Fletcher Jr.; and Fifth Place: LaShundra Scott.

In addition to those five, there are another 1,200 volunteers who have donated a combined 14,456 hours to the district. Monica O'briant, VIPS coordinator with the district, said one could double the number of hours because many people volunteer but do not log their time as a volunteer for VIPS, which is supported in part by the United Way of Southeast Arkansas.

One new wrinkle this past year has been to work churches into the program. Now, for the first time, there is a church assigned to each school thereby providing a touch point between the faith community and the education community.

As part of the celebration, the Pine Bluff School District's Linda Watson, the superintendent, honored the group at a luncheon, which was attended by some of the original steering committee members. They are: Chairman of the Committee Pat Brown and members Bettie Mildred Pierce, Pat Reese, Joyce Holloway and John Jacob. Other members of the steering committee included Vivian Howard, Charlie Johnson, Shirley Twiss, Sue Smith, Bobbi Goldman, Sue Trotter and Lanier Stevens.

Standing ovation for these folks who pulled this entity together four decades ago. We are indebted to you, and we are all better because of you. Thank you, VIPS!

District Creatively Recruiting Students on Heels of School Choice Act (KARK, Channel 4)

Video available at http://arkansasmatters.com/fulltext/?nxd_id=664462

Because every extra penny counts one school district is getting creative to bring in more students.

It's thanks to the School Choice Act of 2013.

Drew Central Public Schools just came out from under the microscope of the state. They were labled until this week in fiscal distress.

They say this School Choice Act comes at a crucial time when money really matters especially for a district just trying to keep up with competition.

"Aboard the pirate ship," said Drew Central Middle School Principal Joy Graham. "We are the Pirates!"

The Drew Central School District is trying to find the best way to get as many students through their doors as possible.

Coming on the heels of the School Choice Act of 2013 a handful teachers and administrators came up with an ad promoting their district.

"We played on the theme of our mascot," Graham explained.

It's an advertisement for everything they have to offer. One of the fan favorites: free breakfast in the classroom.

Graham shared the question they posed themselves, "How can we get the word out that we've got the best school in SE Arkansas?"

Which can be fighting words in earshot of their neighbors.

"Of course we share this area," explained Director of Instruction Kim Greer about their relationship with Monticello School District. "We're in each others back door."

Drew Central nearly surrounds Monticello. With fewer than a thousand students they're smaller but cover more land.

The Drew Central buses travel 1,500 miles a day. The costs add up quick. In a month they spend \$15-20k in diesel gas alone.

It's one more reason why they need every additional student they can get. More students means more money. Which means with more students they're able to provide more programs. In effect, sending the district in the direction they want to go.

"We always want to be the best school in SE Arkansas," Graham remarked.

The Department of Education didn't have an estimate on how many students have taken advantage of School Choice. In Drew Central they claim parent after parent has come to the office asking where to file their paperwork.

The deadline for parents and their children to file is June 1.

In many cases they will only be approved on a first-come first-serve basis due to restrictions in the law.

Turner to head troubled district (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

Eureka Springs Superintendent Curtis Turner Jr. is taking his 26 years of school district leadership experience to Mineral Springs.

Arkansas Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell on Friday announced his appointment of Turner as the new superintendent of the 482-student, financially troubled district, the operation of which was taken over by Kimbrell just the day before.

"Mr. Turner has experience in assisting fiscally distressed school districts develop and work through recovery and improvement plans," Kimbrell said in a released statement. "I believe he is the right person to look at the big picture and know what the priorities are."

Turner, 61, a native of Murfreesboro, has been a superintendent in five Arkansas school districts, including the Murfreesboro district - now the South Pike County district - that he helped guide out of the state's fiscal distress program after his hiring there in 2008.

He also is a former program manager in the Arkansas Department of Education's fiscal distress unit.

Turner said Friday that he had submitted his resignation Thursday night to the Eureka Springs School Board after receiving a call from Kimbrell asking him to head the Mineral Springs district. He started work as an acting superintendent in the district in January 2012 and was given the job full-time that spring. He had two years left on his Eureka Springs contract.

"I'm honored that Dr. Kimbrell would call me," Turner said. "That really meant a lot to me personally, as well as professionally. I do think Dr. Kimbrell has done an excellent job in the state of Arkansas, and it just honors me that he would appoint me to that position."

Turner, who said he will be paid an annual salary of \$90,000 in Mineral Springs, will serve in Eureka Springs through the end of June and take over in Mineral Springs on July 1.

Kimbrell on Thursday dissolved the seven-member School Board for the Mineral Springs district, which serves the Mineral Springs and Saratoga communities. He asked the district's acting superintendent, Bill Blackwood, to remain on the job until a replacement superintendent could take over.

The takeover occurred after state officials concluded that the district - categorized by the state Board of Education as fiscally distressed in December - had insufficient cash flow to complete the school year and would likely need a loan to meet payroll and other obligations.

Additionally, the district's audit for the 2011-12 school year showed that the district was paying eight employees and meeting other expenses with federal Title I funds that were restricted for other uses. The unallowable costs totaled \$132,719, according to the audit.

Asked why he would choose to move from the affluent north Arkansas system with a newly opened \$11.5 million high school to the far more troubled system, Turner said Friday that he had a combination of reasons.

"Having worked in this area and done this, I wanted to take on the challenge," he said. He also said Mineral Springs is close - 20 miles - from his Murfreesboro home and family members.

Earlier this school year, Turner had interviewed with the now-former Mineral Springs School Board about filling the superintendent's position there.

Sen. Larry Teague, D-Nashville, whose district includes the Mineral Springs and Saratoga communities, said Friday that he regretted that it was necessary for the state to take control of the district from which his father graduated and coached.

But, Teague said, the state takeover "could not have been a surprise" to the community and that it can be viewed as a way to get some help into the district and keep it open.

"I hope everyone will get behind it," he said of the efforts. "I've been telling everyone who calls that it's a last chance. They have to gut up - step up - to save the district, or get ready to be a Scrapper!"

The Mineral Springs School District is on the southern border of the Nashville School District - the home of the Nashville High Scrappers. If the Mineral Springs district cannot regain financial solvency within a set amount of time, the state Education Board is required by law to take action against the district, such as annexing it into Nashville or another nearby district.

The Omnibus Education Act of 2003 authorizes the state education commissioner to take control of a district that has been classified by the state Board of Education as being in "fiscal distress" and is not making satisfactory progress toward correcting its financial problems. Until this year, districts in fiscal distress had just two years to rebuild their reserve funds and/or correct management flaws or face state Board of Education action. Act 600, passed earlier this year, allows a district - with state Education Board approval - to stay in fiscal distress for up to five years if progress is being made.

Turner, who has bachelor's and master's degrees from Henderson State University, was a teacher for 1 ½ years, and a principal for four years. He is a former superintendent of what was the Delight School District in 1986-89, and again from 2005-07. He was later superintendent of Murfreesboro School District when it merged with Delight and became the South Pike County School District.

Gavel falls on '13 legislative session (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

The Arkansas General Assembly quietly ended its 101-day regular session Friday without attempting to override Gov. Mike Beebe's vetoes of three election bills sponsored by an outspoken Republican critic of Beebe.

Seventeen of the Senate's 35 members and about 75 of the House's 100 members turned out to briefly pray and recite the Pledge of Allegiance before formally adjourning the longest regular session since the General Assembly met for 121 days in 1931.

The Republican-controlled Legislature recessed on April 23 after authorizing the use of federal dollars to purchase private health insurance for about 250,000 uninsured Arkansans, approving tax cuts projected to lower state tax revenue by more than \$100 million a year in fiscal 2015 and 2016, and passing a \$125 million bond issue for a proposed \$1.1 billion steel mill in Osceola.

Lawmakers previously voted to override Beebe's vetoes of two abortion bills: one banning most abortions after 12 weeks and one outlawing most abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy. Lawmakers also overrode a veto of legislation requiring Arkansans to present photo identification in order to vote.

Sen. Bryan King, R-Green Forest, had hoped to get 18 votes in the Senate and 51 votes in the House to override Beebe's vetoes of three bills that King said are aimed at curbing election fraud.

But King's hopes fizzled after Senate President Pro Tempore Michael Lamoureux, R-Russellville, said earlier this week that he didn't expect enough senators to show up Friday to override Beebe's vetoes.

Beebe vetoed Senate Bill 721 to allow the termination of the six appointed members of the seven-member Board of Election Commissioners, effective July 1, and the expansion of the board from seven to nine members.

Beebe also vetoed Senate Bill 719 to create a Voter Integrity Unit under Republican Secretary of State Mark Martin, and Senate Bill 720 to authorize the state Board of Election Commissioners to remove a county board of election commissioners under certain conditions.

Beebe has said he vetoed the three bills because election officials and commissioners viewed them as "unwarranted attempts to undo a carefully crafted system of checks and balances and divisions of responsibility between the state Board of Election Commissioners, the secretary of state's office and local election commissioners."

King, who skipped Friday's session after realizing that he didn't have enough votes to override the vetoes, said it was "cowardly" for Beebe to wait to veto the three bills until after the Legislature recessed on April 23.

But Arkansas law gives the governor five business days to decide whether to sign laws; and King's bills were delivered to the governor on April 19, according to the General Assembly's website.

Beebe spokesman Matt DeCampbell defended the governor's timing, saying "We vetoed the bills when we got them."

Lamoureux acknowledged Friday that some Republican senators had election officials in their Senate districts oppose some of these bills.

"It wasn't just a Republican and Democrat issue," he said. "I think it depended on how the current makeup of the Election Commission was working, so I just don't think there was overriding support to override [it]."

Lamoureux, a former Senate Republican whip, said he never decided whether he would have voted to override Beebe's vetoes of the three bills.

While some lawmakers were focused on wrapping up the 2013 legislative session, others were already preparing for future leadership battles.

At least two House members are trying to determine whether they have enough support to be elected speaker in 2015.

They are Reps. Jeremy Gillam, R-Judsonia, and Kim Hammer, R-Benton.

Gillam, a farmer, is chairman of the House Management Committee and chairman of the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Courts and Civil Law.

Hammer, a hospice chaplain, is House chairman of the Legislative Joint Auditing Committee and House chairman of the Legislative Council's Executive Committee.

Rep. Davy Carter, R-Cabot, will be speaker through 2014.

The House speaker appoints committee chairmen and decides to which committees bills are sent. He presides over debate in the House, choosing which members will be allowed to speak for or against bills or make motions affecting the House action on the bills.

The next election for House speaker-designate will be held 15 minutes after the Legislature's fiscal session officially ends in 2014, according to House Chief Operating Officer Bill Stovall.

While Hammer opposed the move to use federal funds to purchase private health insurance plans for 250,000 low-income Arkansans. Gillam supported the new program.

Artwork from students across state on display (KTHV, Channel 11)

Video available at <http://littlerock.todaysthv.com/news/news/186083-artwork-students-across-state-display>

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (May 18, 2013) - The Arkansas Art Educators State Youth Art Show 2013 is currently on display for visitors at the Butler Center Galleries in the River Market area of Little Rock.

Each year throughout the regions of the state, members of the Arkansas Art Educators are asked to submit exemplary pieces of artwork created by Kindergarten through high school students in their classrooms.

A variety of two-dimensional projects ranging from painting, drawing, printmaking, collage, mixed media and computer generated work are judged.

Over 700 pieces of artwork are submitted for consideration. A single piece of artwork from each grade level is selected from each region to represent that area of the state. Judged by art teachers and professional artists, the quality of work selected represents the breadth of learning taking place in art classrooms throughout the state.

The award-winning art pieces will be at the Butler Center from now until July 17.

The Arkansas Art Educators is a made up of art teachers from all over the state who work with the Arkansas Department of Education to provide teachers with high quality in-service training and to promote student art in the state. The AAE State Youth Art Show 2013 exhibition is a partnership between the Arkansas Art Educators and the Arkansas Department of Education.

Kids Help K-9 Get Bullet Proof Vest (KARK, Channel 4)

SPRINGDALE, Ar. -- A police dog will be getting extra protection after a group of elementary schools students decided to help.

During a recent Springdale Police Department presentation to T.G. Smith elementary school, a student asked Officer Morris Irvin why his K-9 companion, Xato, didn't wear a vest like his human counterpart.

Officer Irvin explained that a vest was costly and the department could not provide one.

Since then, the students at T.G. Smith Elementary began raising money for Xato to get a vest, raising a reported \$750.

On Friday, they invited Officer Irvin to come back to the school and surprised him and Xato with a check.